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AUTHOR Berger, Jeffrey
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ABSTRACT

The first goal of a writing-across-the-curriculum program is to convince content area teachers that the movement can aid them in fulfilling their goals. Rather than trying to inspire individual faculty members, the writing-across-the-curriculum program at the Community College of Philadelphia restructures the classroom teaching situation. The developers concentrated on the revision process, designing a "heuristic for revision" for use in faculty led peer review groups. The heuristic invites students to rethink the essay along with the author, to take revision beyond the sentence level. The use of the heuristic has also affected the design of writing assignments, since it presupposes an audience and purpose as well as a genuine intellectual problem. Reaching consensus about the nature and goals of writing assignments required creating an interpretative community that could hold discussions about the merits of individual student papers and could reach agreement about the types of revision that could improve the student's writing. This was done by making structural changes in the teaching situation, taking control of the writing assignment out of the hands of the content area teachers and composition teachers individually, and working with them collectively. (HTH)

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Beyond the Workshop:

Building Faculty Development into the WAC Program

Jeffrey Berger

Writing-across-the-curriculum is the new religion on campus, and like all new religions, its first task is gaining converts. Thus, English Department members are going out like missionaries to other departments bringing the good news to the heathen. As could be expected, though, these other departments have their own religions and are sceptical of what they often perceive as English Imperialism. Since most departments already require writing from their students, there is some question as to whether the new God is any different from their traditional God.

The religious metaphor I have been elaborating is more than simply amusing: it provides a key insight into the practices of the Writing-across-the-curriculum movement. Since the first goal of the movement must be to convince sceptical faculty members, its approach must be motivational--akin to instilling religious enthusiasm. It must inspire faculty members who have concerns of their own to take seriously the concerns of the English Department; or, rather, the movement must convince content area teachers that the Writing-across-the-curriculum movement can aid them in fulfilling their goals. Since the final decision about incorporating Writing-across-the-curriculum into the

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classroom lies with the individual teacher, project developers must approach their colleagues either as supplicants seeking favors or missionaries seeking converts. Thus, the goals of the movement are compromised to begin with because project developers have limit themselves to techniques that are easily learned and can be used with only minimal changes in existing course design and objectives. Given the need to convince individual faculty members, who have little incentive to incorporate Writing-across-the-curriculum into their courses, substantial changes in current practices are unlikely. Writing-across-the-curriculum is reduced to a set of "tricks" (a term used by one member of our English Department to describe some elements of his faculty development program), instead of a strategy for restructuring writing and thinking processes (which alone would justify the fervor of Writing-across-the-curriculum proponents). While writing-across-the-curriculum proponents often claim that they are advocating something that will make life easier for content area teachers, the truth is that any meaningful changes will require a major alteration of existing classroom practices. The resistance of faculty to writing-across-the-curriculum can in part be explained by their correct perception that the movement aims at fundamentally altering their way of teaching--a threatening prospect to most teachers, to say the least.

Typically, a Writing-across-the-curriculum faculty development program begins with a workshop like that described by Toby Fulwiler in the February, 1981 issue of College English. Relying on the "halo effect", Fulwiler takes faculty off to the backwoods of Alberta for a 2-4 day workshop. The workshop I attended at Beaver College, was five weeks long with room, board and an honorarium provided courtesy of the NEH.

The basic philosophy of both workshops, though, was the same. As Fulwiler states it, "to improve student writing we had to influence the entire academic community in which writing takes place, to make the faculty sensitive to the role of writing in learning..." (p. 113) (Note the use of "influence" and "sensitive".) Of the three "general concepts" (his term) that he seeks to "introduce" all are really propositions that he is seeking to convince content area faculty to accept: that writing can aid learning, that writing can structure "all assignments and evaluation" and that "students write poorly for a variety of reasons". Thus, he is approaching his colleagues with something he is trying to sell.

Fulwiler's article is a forthright discussion of the successes and limitations of the Writing-across-the-curriculum program at Michigan Technological University. As to limitations, he begins by writing off about 50% of the

faculty (a figure he gave at the Writing-across-the-curriculum Interest Group meeting at the last CCCC). These are "unmotivated, inflexible, or highly-suspicious faculty members" and those "constitutionally uncomfortable with workshop-style activities". (p. 115) Note that Fulwiler does not admit of any legitimate intellectual or pedagogical objections to his program. "Resistance" (his term) is the result character defects in the people he is unable to reach.

One of the major problems Fulwiler finds among the psychologically fit is that many of them are unable to translate the workshop into acceptable programs in their disciplines. Additionally, there are those who revert to old practices after a semester's experiment (backsliders). Fulwiler admits that "We don't believe that a writing-across-the-disciplines program can maintain white heat (or even red) throughout its term of operation." and "...the teacher-centered model depends on teacher energy and informed pedagogy to work and keep working." (p. 118) Note again the stress on teacher motivation for the success of the Writing-across-the-curriculum program. Fulwiler's answer to the problem of motivation is a *revival*. "Some years we have had alumni reunions, winter workshops, guest speakers, discipline specific seminars with individual departments and informational mailings---one year we even published a monthly newsletter." (p. 119)

To summarize, the typical workshop approach to faculty development uses a combination of peer pressure, financial rewards, and hype in the hope (and that is all there can be) that individual faculty members will be inspired to alter current classroom practices and introduce some Writing-across-the-curriculum techniques into their courses. While touting an idealist revolutionary line, the writing-across-the-curriculum movement is forced to respond to faculty who want a quick pay off with little effort--like the "rice Christians" of China. This is rather meager fare considering the stated goals of the movement.

Yet, the "unexpected benefits" (his phrase) of Fulwiler's program give us more than hope. They provide clues to the potentialities of a Writing-across-the-curriculum program. One such benefit was the development of a "community of scholars". (p. 121) In fact, Fulwiler finds this to be "the most powerful reason for the program's successes." This on-going cooperation, instances of which Fulwiler details in his article, provides, we believe, the real basis for a meaningful faculty development program. Thus, the faculty development program at the Community College of Philadelphia seeks to institutionalize this community of scholars by structural rather than motivational means. Rather than trying to inspire individual faculty members, we restructure the teaching situation such that

Writing-across-the-curriculum is built into classroom practices.

The program itself was a by-product of a wider rethinking of general education requirements at the college. The development stages of our Honors Program and Transfer Opportunities Program required teachers to design a curriculum collectively and, more importantly, teach collectively. For the first time, teachers were not masters of their own classroom and were subject to the critical gaze of their colleagues. At the same time, the faculty development program was less frightening and more fun because it was a collaborative effort (giving faculty members a stake in the outcome), rather than a project of the English Department to convert their colleagues. (The writing program design actually originated in the Philosophy Department and this itself had a positive effect on its acceptance.)

The Writing-across-the-curriculum component of the program grew out of disputes between composition and content area faculty. When teachers were forced to agree on joint writing assignments and evaluation procedures, it rapidly became clear that there was little agreement about the purpose of writing assignments. Social scientists, for example, who were used to multiple choice tests, tended to view essays as a means for students to display information. (Typically, the composition skills component was seen as

limited to spelling and grammar.) Their method of grading was to look for the number of "points" that the student got correct. If the instructor thought that there were 10 key ideas, then a student would only get an A, if he or she got at least 9 of them. While social scientists might pay lip service to questions of organization and style (although rarely even that) and while they could readily differentiate a well-written from a poorly-written paper, they evaluated solely on the basis of information and had no idea of how to get from a poorly-written to a well-written essay. Behind the dispute about writing was the question of how the social scientists viewed their tasks in introductory courses. After years of teaching low level courses in a community college, they had reduced their expectations to having students memorize facts. This became apparent when one teacher, claiming the need for more time for his discipline, objected that he had all this "stuff" he had to teach. In short, while designing an interdisciplinary program, teachers were running for the shelter of the only thing they knew, their introductory courses.

Composition teachers also followed this tried and true procedure, insisting that students must start with narratives and run through the various rhetorical modes. Since they were used to contentless courses, where they could shape assignments to fit the rhetorical modes, they wanted to turn

intellectual problems into rhetorical exercises, rather than seeing the intellectual problem as providing the purpose for the written exercise. In addition, they tended to value form over content. Since they were not experts in the content areas, they often gave good evaluations to well organized inanities, much to the consternation of the content area teachers. Social scientists saw no value to an emphasis on thesis statements, topic sentences, and outlines when that approach led to no improvement the intellectual level of the student's responses.

Most importantly, the composition and content area teachers tended to dismiss the each other's concerns. Moreover, content area teachers often resented the composition teachers' claims to expertise. Since many content area teachers had been assigning essays for years, and composition teachers had not been noticeably effective in passing their composition skills on to students, the claims of composition teachers seemed overstated and the abilities of content area teachers to teach the writing of essays within their discipline seemed undervalued.

At the same time that we were trying to resolve these disputes among the faculty, we were looking for ways to meet our primary goals of making students more self-reflective in their intellectual pursuits. In order to achieve that goal in writing, we decided to concentrate on the revision

process. This led us to design a "Heuristic for Revision" (see Appendix I). The heuristic is intended for use in faculty led peer review groups and its effect on faculty was as noteworthy as its effect on students.

Fulwiler noted that peer review was "perhaps the most difficult practice for teachers" (p. 117) and to be done successfully required that teachers substantially modify their courses. Since we had collective control over an entire experimental curriculum, and since we had a project director who was perceived as a leader both organizationally and intellectually, it was relatively easy to get agreement to try the heuristic in peer review sessions, despite departure from traditional practice.

Fulwiler is correct to identify the peer review group as the most perilous of Writing-across-the-curriculum approaches. However, it can also, when done properly, be one of the most intellectually rewarding. If simply left to themselves, students are no more likely to generate a well-written second draft than they were able to generate a well-written first draft--nor are their peers invariably a source for mature reflection. Even with our heuristic, which at least gives students some guidelines for criticism, students, whether out of a misguided sense of loyalty to fellow students or an inability to conceive of alternatives, tend to be unable to find anything to criticize in first drafts.

Likewise, even while they are highly critical of poor student writing, content area teachers often are at a loss as to how to revise that writing.

Thus, for the sake of both students and faculty, extensive modeling is necessary, if the peer review sessions are to have any hope for success. Our faculty led peer review sessions pair^{ing} a writing instructor familiar with the heuristic with a content area teacher. At first, the students tend to be silent and the content area teacher reticent. Then, the students deny that there is anything wrong with the essay and attack the heuristic. When spelling and punctuation errors are read aloud, they

blame the speaker rather than the author. When asked to describe their reactions, students begin discussing the essay. When asked to describe what the writer takes his/her task to be, they say that it is identical with the task stated in the question. After several weeks, students might hazard a guess: "It lacks authority?"; but are unable to explain why. They have picked up the lingo, but don't have a working understanding. It is only after a semester's exposure that students develop any facility at critically evaluating first drafts. Our peer review strategy, then, is a skill to be learned, we believe one of the most important skills, and not a simple technique that can be incorporated along with others as an enhancement to existing courses.

Because of its centrality and because of the extensive amount of time necessary to train both faculty and students in its use, peer review, using our "Heuristic for Revision", virtually replaced the Basic Composition course as the foundation of our writing program.

The heuristic is aimed at faculty as much as students. It is designed to address the rhetorical concerns of composition teachers, and, thus, draw content area faculty away from an informational model of writing. At the same time, the concerns of the content area teachers are addressed by demonstrating how the heuristic can lead to greater complexity in thought and more sophisticated essays. Further, the heuristic provides content area teachers with an approach to revision which will generate the types of essays that they can recognize as superior, but were unable to help students to write.

Rather than focusing on what students *don't do* (information they leave out, bad grammar and spelling, lack of organization), the heuristic is designed to elicit what student writers *do* that gets them into trouble. The overall goal of the heuristic is to bring to the surface the thought patterns that generated the essay. Rather than criticizing the essay, which can often focus on superficial aspects, the heuristic invites students to rethink the essay along with the author. Thus, students who were used to revising on the

word and sentence level are forced into revisions on a conceptual level. Questions of form and content, which were seen as the provinces of separate disciplines, are fused into the inseparable whole they are by the heuristic. Rather than trying to fit their writing into some preconceived organizational schema or rhetorical mode, students generate an organization and style that is appropriate to the intellectual problem they are trying to solve.

The use of the heuristic has also affected the design of assignments, as would be expected. A commitment on the part of the team to use the heuristic requires a commitment to rethinking the writing assignment, since the heuristic presupposes an audience and purpose as well as a genuine intellectual problem. To generate such a problem it is necessary to devise a discursive question which places students in the center of a dispute. Gone are the one liners like, "What are the social, economic and political roots of the French Revolution?" (which can be translated as, tell me everything you know about the French Revolution in a form acceptable to me—where there is no audience, no purpose and no problem to solve other than how to please the teacher). This is replaced with a question in which a series of interrelated problems are posed and various answers and methods of approaching the material are modeled for students. (See Appendix II). These questions are designed by the

writing coordinator in consultation with the rest of the team, as a means of modeling alternatives to traditional assignments.

While we were successful in gaining initial acceptance of our Writing-across-the-curriculum model, ultimately it the teaching team that had to decide its fate. By demonstrating to them in practice that this method of teaching writing produces better essays from the point of view of both content area teachers and composition teachers, we won their endorsement for the program, altering in the process the way in which content area teachers as well as composition teachers approach the teaching of writing. In effect what we were doing was, to use Fish's term, creating an "interpretive community". Our problem was that the writing and content areas were so fragmented that they did not have a common language for discussing essays. Reaching agreement about the nature and goals of written assignments, which is necessary for any meaningful writing-across-the-curriculum program, required that we reestablish an academic community by creating an interpretive community which could hold discussions about merits of individual student papers and could reach agreement about the types of revisions which could improve student writing.

We were able to do this by making structural changes in the teaching situation, taking control of the writing

assignment out of the hands of the content area and composition teachers individually, vesting it with them collectively, and providing them with a method for helping them to rethink the writing assignment and the teaching of writing. As a result, we came to realize that it is necessary to go beyond the workshop and embed the faculty development program in classroom practices, in order to realize the profound changes promised by the Writing-across-the-curriculum movement.

Jeffrey Berger

Associate Professor of Philosophy
Community College of Philadelphia
1700 Spring Garden St.
Philadelphia, Pa. 19130

Appendix I

Writing Group Heuristic

1. Read the essay aloud, following the author's spelling and punctuation.

2. Describe your initial reaction to the paper (satisfied, confused, cheated, impressed, intimidated, etc.). What is it that produced this reaction?

Describe the essay as if it were a voice speaking. Is it whining, moaning, lecturing, cajoling, pleading, shouting, joking? Is that voice related to your reaction? Will your reaction be shared by your audience?

3. What sort of stance does the writer take towards the audience (superiority, cronyism, contempt, fear)? What sort of attitude does the author assume that the audience will have? What can you point to that supports your claims here? Given what you know of the audience, are these assumptions correct? Is the stance appropriate?

4. What does the writer take his task to be? How does s/he conceive the essay? How does s/he go at the problem, i.e., what does s/he conceive as the project (educate, inform, convince, prove, disprove, etc.)?

5. What is the general structure of the essay (a list, a sequence, deductive, inductive, expository, causal, comparison/contrast, etc.)? Is the structure appropriate for what the writer takes the task to be? For what you take the task to be?

6. How does the author establish his/her authority? Does the author cite suitable evidence or authority? Does the complexity of the analysis bear the weight of the argument? Is it possible to respond "so you say" or "so what?" to the essay?

7. What kinds of relations does the writer employ in the essay (and, but, if/then, unless, nevertheless, therefore, because, however, even so, etc.)? How frequently are they deployed? Between major divisions as discovered in #5 above? Between paragraphs? Between sentences? Within sentences? (e.g., a list contains only "and" relations)

8. Do you as a reader understand where you are at all times? Is this related to #7 above? If pronouns are used--especially "this" and "it"--is the reference obvious? Are events strongly related to other events? Are actions linked to actors?

9. Jot down your emotional reactions to the essay and what you take the positions developed to be. Given the above, does the essay satisfy what the writer takes his/her project to be?

Appendix II

Transfer Opportunities Program Writing Assignment I Fall '84

One of the starting points of the social sciences is the direct observation and explanation of human behavior. The key here is going beyond the surface explanations or self-characterization of the subjects to find deeper social-psychological patterns of explanation.

Describe the behavior of an individual or group of individuals that you find around the school and provide an explanation for that behavior. Assume that your audience is a student who has never taken a course in the social sciences. You may make use of any explanatory patterns that have arisen in your social science classes this semester. However, you will have to make them intelligible to your peers.

You will be judged on the sophistication of your answer. This means that you have to choose the behavior you are studying carefully. It will have to be something worthy of explanation. Likewise, your explanation will have to go beyond surface readings to reveal deeply embedded psycho-social patterns. In other words, avoid obvious readings of obvious behaviors.

First Public Draft Due: Monday, Oct. 1

Length: about 3 typed pages (double spaced)

Transfer Opportunities Program
Fall '84
Writing Assignment I
Option 2

Try to explain to a peer why any student you know is going to college. The problem is not as easy as it appears. The student you are studying will probably offer a series of reasons (e.g., I want to get ahead). But, how trustworthy are these responses? Generally, psychologists look for motivations (causes) rather than purposes. The purposes might be obvious to the student, but is that person the best judge of personal motivations? In addition, the choices the student makes always occur in a social context. Are the motivations of the student significantly different from that of other students so that an individual psychological model is the most appropriate. Even if they are different, wouldn't a sociologist be able to use the concept of deviance to provide a sociological explanation? If the student's motivations were the same as those of other students, does that rule out individual psychological explanations. Is it possible to combine social and psychological explanations? Or do they form complimentary or possibly contradictory ways of viewing the same subject? If the student's own self-characterizations are not trustworthy, how are we to judge of motivations? Do the student's self-characterizations provide us with clues which we merely have to follow? The problem is ultimately one of deciding what is to count as an acceptable explanation in the social sciences.

When you finish deciding on how to frame your explanation, see how that explanation applies to your own case. Is it a matter of making a few simple changes in the explanation to accommodate your particular situation or would you have to totally reconceptualize your answer and find new explanatory patterns to fit your case?

First Public Draft Due: Monday, October 1

Length: about 3 typed pages (double spaced)

TOP
Social Science Semester
Fall '84
Writing Assignment 2

Social Scientists often claim to be value free. Yet, they also believe that they can make important contributions to solving moral dilemmas. Are these two positions consistent?

Consider the homosexuality issue as presented in Taking Sides (Psychological Issues), Issue 6. Two psychologists--purportedly impartial--find themselves arguing on different sides of what would appear to be a moral issue. What is the basis for their disagreement? Do they differ about the facts of the case? Are they arguing out of different conceptual models? Is their argument centered in a values dispute? Possibly all three are involved.

Try to make sense of their disagreement and use that to throw light on the extent to which social science can be simultaneously useful and value free in attempting to resolve moral issues. Assume that your audience is a group of social science teachers.